

ADVOCATES SPEAK

HOW FUNDERS CAN BEST SUPPORT SRHR ADVOCACY

In November 2019, advocates from around the world came together in Ottawa, Canada to participate in collective learning and strategizing on advocacy for the advancement of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Part of these discussions included sharing experiences, learnings, and advice on how to best support SRHR advocacy. The group came up with various recommendations for funders based on their experience as grantees.

DEFINING SRHR ADVOCACY

Advocacy for the advancement of SRHR is difficult to define as it covers a wide range of activities and strategies that are largely shaped by political contexts and the environments in which advocates work. While there is no one specific recipe for SRHR advocacy, advocates agreed that SRHR advocacy is a **feminist and decolonial tool to disrupt power, change discourse, and drive accountability**.

Key principles of SRHR advocacy were identified as movement building, anti-racism, intersectionality, representation, ownership, a grassroots approach, and the recognition and disruption of discriminatory systems. Importantly, **advocacy should be defined by those doing the work, not by donors or other actors**.

BEING ACCOUNTABLE TO MOVEMENTS

To foster accountability to grantees and movements, **funders must recognize the power they hold and respect the autonomy of grantees**. This can be done through **building trust-based relationships and practicing transparency around priorities, values, processes, and spending**. Funders should support movement building and be open to restructuring funding models to better meet grantee needs (e.g. reassessing monitoring and evaluation requirements).

With increased funder interest in supporting SRHR advocacy in recent years, the participation of funders in advocacy spaces has also increased. This can lead to funders taking on active or directive roles within movements and stifling the voices of grassroots advocates, reinforcing hierarchies and systems of oppression.

Accountability within movements

is also a key consideration. The process of sub-granting and/or the use of intermediary organizations has led to shifts in the traditional funder/grantee relationship. While this model places value on partnerships and movement building, it can lead to competition for funding and increased financial support for larger – and often Global North-based coordinating organizations, thus shifting power and accountability. While these funding models offer new ways to reach grassroots advocates, they should not be viewed as the sole remedy in addressing flawed funding models.

EMERGING RECOMMENDATIONS

Funding proposals

- Look to strong track records and sound financial management to justify support for organizations in place of overly rigorous proposal processes
- Ask the question “what is necessary?” versus “what is reasonable?”. Are the proposal requirements commensurate to the funding itself? Are the criteria fair and reasonable?
- Develop systems to facilitate the funding of unregistered and informal groups doing SRHR advocacy. For their safety and/or due to the politicization of their work, and other reasons, many groups and organizations are unable to, or choose not to, legally register in their countries
- Invest in feminist learning (e.g. research, building an evidence base, strategy, cross-movement learning, feminist monitoring, evaluation, and learning)
- Respond to proposals in a timely manner

Reporting

- Adopt fit-for-purpose, flexible, advocacy-specific reporting processes, and mechanisms, recognizing the unique nature of advocacy to advance SRHR
- Adopt trust-based accountability mechanisms with grantees, looking to grantee track records and prior work
- Recognize the difference between outputs and outcomes
- Solicit suggestions from grantees on alternate ways of documenting work and assessing the efficacy of advocacy
- Work with individual grantees to draft customized monitoring and evaluation questions that meet both parties’ needs
- Use open-ended questions in reporting templates (e.g. How did it go? What did you learn?)
- Consider the use external evaluators (paid for by funder) to take reporting onus off grantee
- Put an end to extractive reporting practices, including donor missions/tourism, requesting beneficiary photos, quotes, and personal stories from beneficiaries, etc.
- Ensure reporting templates are available in various languages and that grantees can submit responses in their native language, fully enabling them to write about their advocacy. It is also important for grant managers and/or regional focal points to speak the grantee’s language.
- Reframe reporting as an opportunity for funders to learn from grantees (as opposed to an opportunity to prove value to funders)

Advocates speak: how funders can best support SRHR advocacy

- Encourage and fund strong documentation practices of grantee learning, and have this learning replace reporting that does not benefit grantees
- Ensure reporting processes and mechanisms create meaning and value to grantees
- Recognize and practice flexibility when it comes to security implications and safety concerns of grantees related to documentation (e.g. when asking for receipts)
- Use calls or meetings in place of reports, maximizing efficiency and putting fewer demands on staff time
- Consider using alternative M&E and reporting mechanisms, such as outcome harvesting

Transparency

- Practice two-way transparency between funders and grantees around priorities, strategic goals, values, and politics
- Enable anonymous two-way evaluation of funder/grantee relationship
- Create spaces for funder/grantee knowledge exchange
- Practice transparency around funder engagement in systems that undercut the work of organizations working to advance SRHR (e.g. support and investment in extractive industries, militarism, etc.)
- Practice transparency in where funding is going and how funding decisions are being made
- Recognize the dual role of some organizations as both funders and grantees (e.g. women's funds, fiscal sponsors, etc.) and the complex power dynamics inherent in this

- Raise awareness around the **non-profit industrial complex** and professionalization of advocacy, and how it can reinforce harmful power structures and weaken movements
- Be critical of the superficial **localization** of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) (i.e. the displacement of truly local organizations by INGOs with greater capacity in funding and advocacy spaces) and how it can undermine local organizations and movements

Funder participation in advocacy spaces

- Adopt principles and guidelines for funders participation in advocacy spaces (e.g. organizations should have space to self-organize, with funders joining at a later stage. Funders should invite grantees to inform them on strategy and update them on their work, in place of joining advocacy spaces)
- Foster greater funder awareness of their power and influence in advocacy spaces and take onus off grantees to communicate this and/or enforce boundaries
 - » INGOs should similarly recognize and acknowledge the power they hold within advocacy spaces and end directive or disruptive behaviour
- Address overrepresentation of funders and the private sector at conferences and convenings. Movements should push back and reclaim these spaces

Advocates speak: how funders can best support SRHR advocacy

Expertise

- Hire advocates from the movements to help inform the funding of advocacy. This requires recognizing a range of experiences and relaxing formal education requirements in hiring
- Listen to movements on discourses around “engaging men and boys” – some INGOs and funders have a superficial understanding of feminist issues and engage in programming that can reinforce patriarchal practices and structural inequalities
- Listen and be receptive to suggestions and feedback from grantees
- Adopt participatory grant-making that engages the movement in funding decisions
- Listen to grantee learnings and expertise and be flexible to changes to logic models and project frameworks
- Funders should assume the responsibility of understanding the context in which advocates are working. By having a clear understanding of what is happening in the city/country/region, donors can better understand systemic change and how to support their grantees’ needs

Sustainability

- Acknowledge that change takes time – offer long-term and flexible funding that can be used to cover essential, indirect and core costs such as rent, salaries, and meeting costs

- Include additional funding to provide organizations with support for parental leaves and other staffing costs
- Recognize and support SRHR advocates as human rights defenders and invest in their safety and security
- Support and promote self-care, safety, and fair remuneration within grantee organizations
- Facilitate introductions to other funders and sources of support
- Allow flexible use of funds for organizations investing in income-generating activities
- Encourage and support the integration of advocacy components alongside service delivery projects
- Do not idealize specific groups or organizations – invest in movements, not just individual actors

Breaking down silos

- Fund and support spaces for movement building, cross-movement collaboration, and strategizing
- Build funder understanding around the interlinkages between issues, the critical role of cross-movement work, and the danger of separating out issues – adjust funding streams and reporting requirements accordingly
- Adopt an intersectional approach and broaden SRHR support to make grants and funding available to LBTOI+-led organizations

Questions funders should ask grantees

- How much money do you need to achieve your goals? What other resources or support do you need to make this project successful?
- What are the external changes that have impacted your organization or advocacy? Internal changes?
- Were there any unexpected changes during the granting period?
- What are the movements that you have worked or collaborated with?
- What advocacy tools/mechanisms/approaches have you used towards your advocacy goals?
- What resources do you need to monitor and evaluate your work?
- How many evaluation cycles would you like (annually, quarterly, etc.)?
- What is the best way to evaluate your work?

- How will this help with your internal learning?
- What are some of the assumptions you are making in your theory of change?
- Do you have any feedback for us about the reporting process or our communication with our grantees?
- What resources did you put into submitting this proposal/report?
- What has been the impact of this grant upon your staff and organization?

Questions to ask funders

- When reviewing funding reports, what do you look at? (with suggestion to remove additional questions)
- What is your process for receiving, analyzing, and using reports?
- Will the reports and information be used in any other way (e.g. policy development)?



Action Canada
for Sexual Health & Rights



Canada

Her Future Her Choice is funded by the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada, Oxfam and individual donors

This convening and report were made possible through support from Global Affairs Canada as part of the **Her Future, Her Choice** project with Oxfam Canada.